



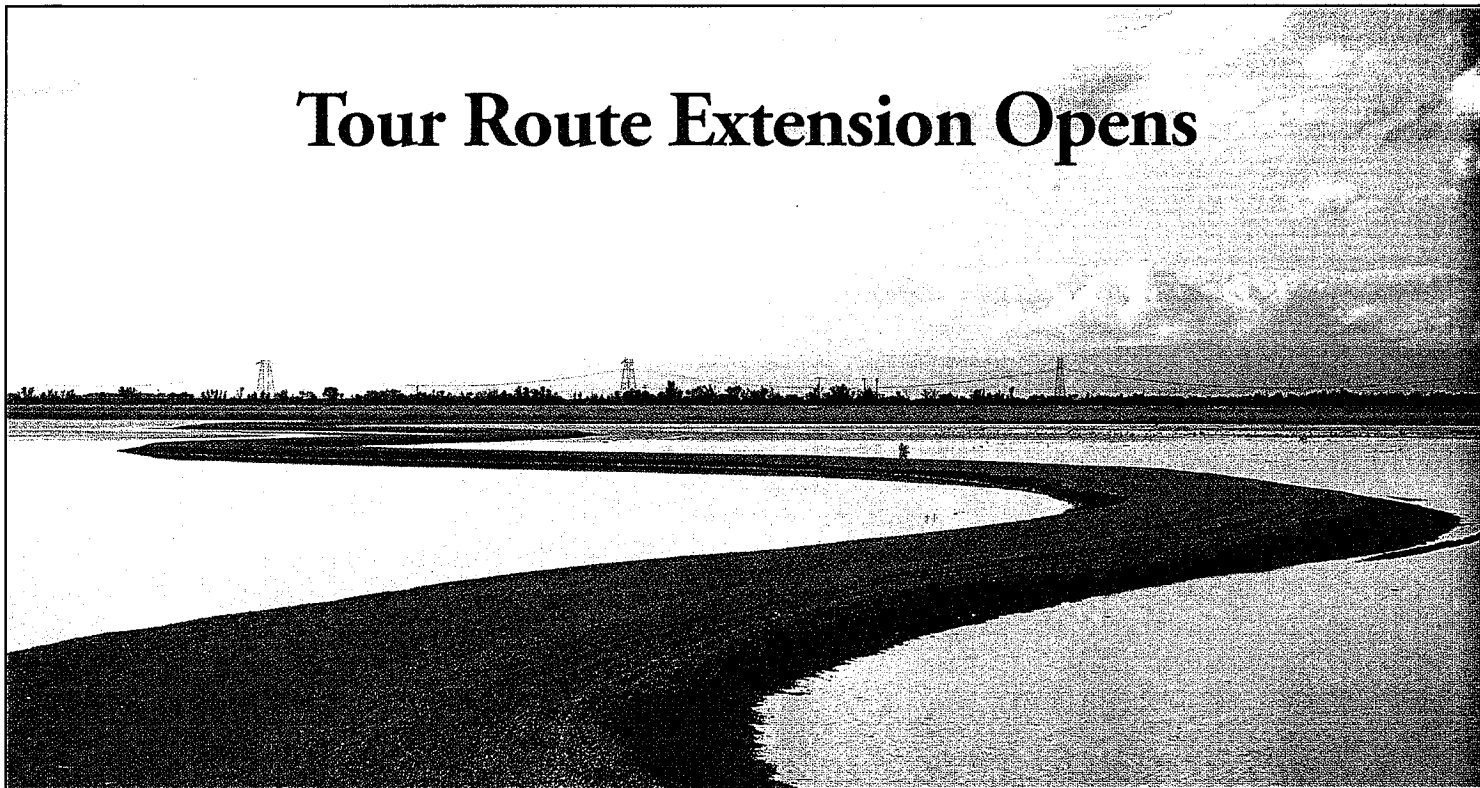
YOLO FLYWAY



Volume 20, Issue 1, Fall 2011

A Publication of the Yolo Basin Foundation and the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area

Tour Route Extension Opens



By Dave Feliz, Manager, Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area

For nearly a hundred years, travelers have been traversing the Yolo Causeway, passing close to incredible numbers of birds during the winter months. Most readers of this article are well aware of the dense flocks of White-fronted Geese, Northern Pintails and Green-winged Teals packed in the flooded rice fields and are easily distracted by the increasing numbers of birds rising like storm clouds above the flood plain. However, I believe a very small percentage of Causeway drivers actually notice the avian chaos erupting to the south.

How do we get the attention of everybody else? And in the process, can we raise their awareness of the tremendous resource that fills this great open space just west of Sacramento?

Anything we do within sight of the Causeway is well noticed. Hence, I frequently receive emails and phone calls about the rice operation and the cattle in the weeds north of the freeway; and also when we bring a group of people close to the highway, and the traffic backs up for half a mile with drivers trying to see what we're looking at. We consider the proximity of Interstate 80 as an opportunity to reach out to people who wouldn't normally notice birds and their habitats. We need to visually present scenes that make it clear to Causeway drivers that many opportunities exist to explore the wetlands in the Yolo Bypass. The auto tour route is one way to do it.

Our tour route is becoming increasingly more visible due to expansions completed in 2008 and this past summer. The road now goes through an active rice farm. If you are visiting in the summer, you see

the DeWit family's lush green rice. During the winter, the harvested fields are flooded, attracting thousands of birds. The leg completed this year takes people further east than they have ever been before. Paul Phillips from California Waterfowl designed and managed the construction of this meandering path currently ending at the edge of extensive wild rice fields. It is an easy walk north to the freeway ponds where we've had Least Bitterns, Tri-colored Blackbirds, and hundreds of early Mallards.

In coming years, the road will begin to run south, eventually forming a loop road about 8 miles in length. It will travel past permanent wetlands, wild rice fields, seasonal wetlands, white rice, and shallow mud flat habitats.

The Wildlife Area is still in its infancy. Expect large numbers of birds in the coming years. Expect visual spectacles that compare with any bird concentrations in the world. Expect the deafening cacophony of snow geese calls and flapping wings, blurred by the high whistles of hundreds of thousands of pintails.

So, come out this winter and explore this inviting new road that winds across a fallow rice field. Get closer to the flocks of swans than ever before. And realize that this road is part of something much bigger and better than any of us imagined. 🦆

Duck Days • February 25-26
See pages 4-5

The Wonder of Winter at the Wetlands

By Ann Burris, Education Coordinator

Thousands of migrating ducks, geese and swans stop at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area every winter. Some come to rest then move on; others stay longer enjoying the quality habitat that the Wildlife Area's 16,000 acres provides. This amazing gathering gives visitors the perfect opportunity to view a wide variety of birds as they go about their daily lives. We arrive at the Wildlife Area just after daybreak, my favorite time to visit this special place. It is chilly out and the sky is overcast. As we start down the gravel road into Parking Lot A, we roll down the windows and turn up the heater. We want to listen to the "morning songs and sounds" and we also want to stay warm. The first sounds are from a couple of Killdeer who were very vocal and active as they fly around us, then land near a mud puddle and become quiet. We slowly move on watching both sides of the road for movement and listening for nature's sounds. The warm pink morning light filters through the clouds, reflecting in the water, highlighting and silhouetting, cattails and tules and the ducks and coots that are silently swimming there.

The silence of the moment is broken by the loud quacks of a Mallard. We stop and see Northern Shovelers, Mallards and American Coots dabbling for an early breakfast. Great Egrets are also seen, some off in the distance, their stark white bodies easily visible as they hunt the edges of the ponds. As we continue we turn to the east, bypassing Parking Lot B, I watch the ditch area on the north side of the road for movement from beavers, muskrats or otters, knowing that this is an area where they might be seen this time of the day. We have no luck this morning.

The ponds on the south side of the road though are busy with silhouettes of ducks and coots gliding through the water, dipping down to eat, then slowly moving on. We see Black-crowned Night Herons singly and silently returning to their roosting area among the cattails. As we turn to the south, along the road to Parking Lot C, we notice a White-tailed Kite sitting quietly atop a willow tree. We stop to take a closer look, but the Kite lifts off and flies across the road to chase a Northern Harrier who is flying low just above

the vegetation on the other side of the road. Just ahead we see a willow with a really large Red-tailed Hawk perched at its top. The tree looks like it is barely able to support the bird and bends under her weight.

The morning sounds really begin as we enter Parking Lot C. We hear hundreds of ducks all talking to each other each with their own special sounds. There are Gadwalls, Northern Shovelers, elegant looking Northern Pintails and beautifully rust colored Cinnamon Teals. We decide this is the perfect place to stop and enjoy a snack. As we sit at the picnic table enjoying our coffee and muffins, we watch a little Marsh Wren as it busily moves from the tules to the pond edge just in front of us. Then it darts back to the tules, then back to

and small "V" flights of geese. Sometimes they are hard to see as their color blends into the clouds, but we keep watching.

Our attention refocuses as our eyes return to the ponds. We get out the spotting scope and find a single Bufflehead, its small black and white body a stark contrast to the muddy bank on which it is sleeping, and an American Wigeon and a Blue-winged Teal float among the other ducks.

Throughout the morning we have seen huge flocks of blackbirds. Some off so far in the distance they look like swarms of tiny black flying specks hovering above the horizon. At other times they are closer and look like ribbons or streamers undulating through the sky. They fly together, split apart, reform,



In the winter, ample opportunities exist for great bird viewing.

Photo: Dave Feliz

the pond's edge. We are attentively watching the wren's antics when we hear the sound of Tundra Swans above us. Quickly, we look up and there they are--twenty graceful long-necked forms. They are close enough to view without binoculars. As the swans pass I look around and notice just above the horizon of vegetation far off to the north that there are thousands of Snow and White-fronted Geese in the sky. We quickly grab our binoculars to watch their movement. Then we start to notice that the sky to the east is filled with large

and then, configure into another form. You could seemingly watch them all day as they perform their aerial ballet and you'll never see the same performance twice.

Morning turns into afternoon, and we decide to head into town for lunch. On our way out we see other cars driving slowly, stopping now and then to enjoy the sights and sounds. We've all come to experience the wonder of winter at the wetlands, and no one leaves the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area disappointed! 🦢

ass Wildlife Area
n.org to see what
register online early so



Scenes from Duck Days 2010

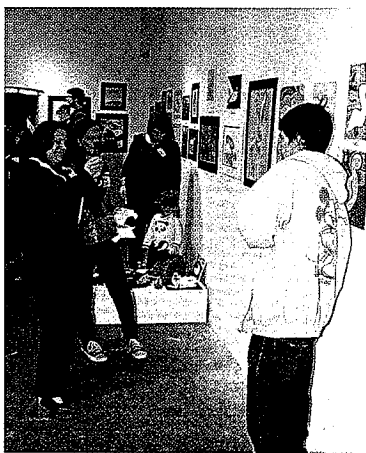
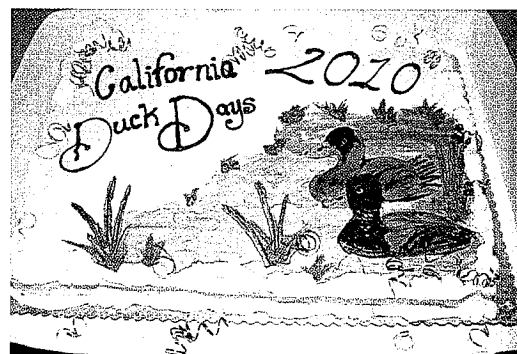
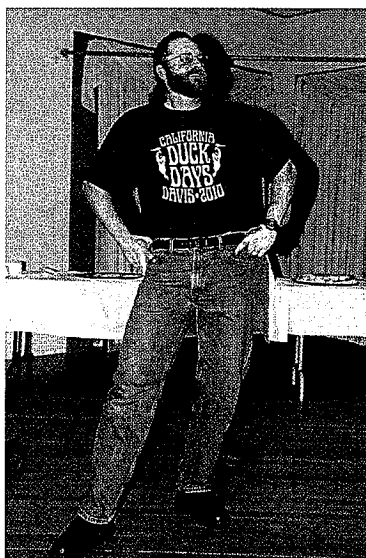
*Photos by:
George Feliz
Pat McKown
Jo Ellen Ryan*



Don't miss the Duck Days Art Show and Welcome Reception!

February 25th, 5:30-7pm at the Davis Art Center

Enjoy the impressive artwork created by Yolo County high school students and the CA Junior Duck Stamp Art. There will also be good food and drink, entertainment by Dave Monterey and great company to kick off Duck Days. This event is free of charge.



Demonstrations



Thanks to Our Youngest Supporters!

Imagine our surprise last summer when a delightful young man, Ian Hawes, a student at Cesar Chavez in Davis, walked into the Yolo Basin Foundation office with \$145. He said he really liked coming to Duck Days and wanted to do something to help. Instead of gifts for his birthday he asked his friends to give money to the Foundation, which he presented to an amazed group of staff members. When we walked outside with him to take a picture, we saw that this was not just something Ian's parents, Peter and Jill, had thought up for him. Ian was immediately engaged in talking to Corky and Ann about the animals he had seen at the pond on a previous visit. We did get him to stop for a quick pose with his donation!

Emily Alessandro is another budding environmental steward hailing from Vacaville. In September her mother mailed Yolo Basin a check for \$50 with a note that said the donation was from her daughter, who participated in Nature Bowl 2010. She made the money by collecting cans and bottles and encouraging her friends at Browns Valley Elementary School to do the same. Mrs. Alessandro said Emily "hopes to be able to make a difference for the Yolo Basin Foundation."

Knowing that young people, such as Ian and Emily, will be adults in just a few years makes us feel optimistic about the future of the environment! ♻️



Yocha Dehe Community Fund

Yolo Basin Foundation is very appreciative to be chosen as a recipient of a grant for \$10,000 from the Yocha Dehe Community Fund in 2010. This money will help to support our Discover the Flyway school program. The Fund is the philanthropic arm of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation. Over the past decade, the Yocha Dehe Community Fund has provided nearly \$18 million in financial support to nonprofit organizations and service providers in Sacramento and Yolo Counties. The Fund offers support in education, community health, arts and culture, the environment, community development and social services. We've been very fortunate to have received grants from the Fund several times, beginning in 2001.

The Yocha Dehe Community Fund is dedicated to creating a healthy community through engaged philanthropy, deep community knowledge and awareness, and active leadership. Focusing on the six core elements mentioned above, the Fund uses philanthropy in ways that can effectively build a high quality of life for Yolo County residents and Native people wherever they live. The Yocha Dehe Community Fund was one of the first to be established by a Native American tribe in California and is a recognized leader in local charitable giving.

We are very thankful to the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation and Yocha Dehe Community Fund for their continued support and confidence in our work. ♻️



Ian Hawes presents YBF educators Corky Quirk and Ann Burris with a generous donation.